

Analyzing Safety Threats

Introduction

We speak frequently of assessing for safety threats. The term “safety assessment” is now well-established in child protective services as a crucial responsibility. Less is said about “analyzing safety threats.” However, once threats are identified, little is more important than analyzing the threats.

Definitions

We don't think “assessing” and “analyzing” are the same. These concepts differ in purpose and degree of evaluation. “Assessing” refers to weighing information or assigning significance to information. Regarding safety intervention, “assessing” seeks to identify information consistent with threatening child safety. When a safety assessment is complete, the result is identification of a safety threat. So, when considering safety intervention, assessing identifies safety threats. Assessing gives weight to information that is consistent with danger or being a threat to safety.

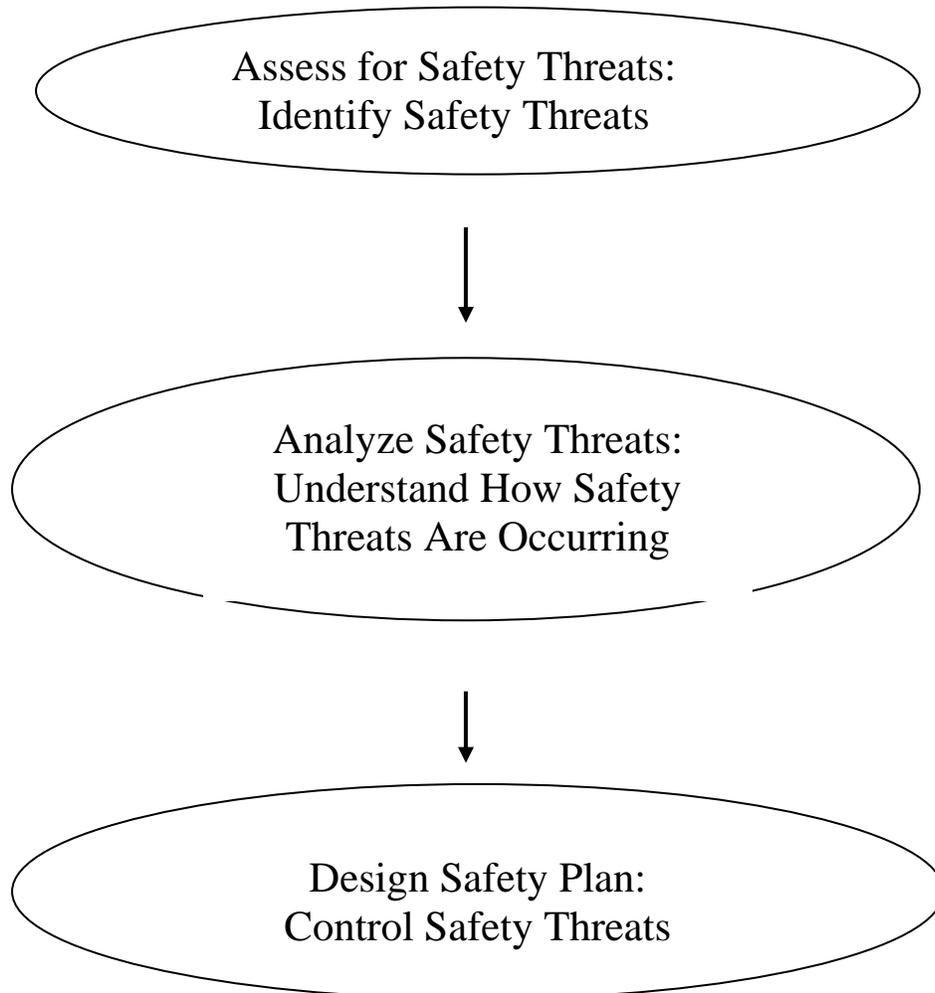
“Analyzing” refers to separating or breaking up a whole into its parts in order to find out the nature, proportion, function, and interrelationship of the whole and the part to the whole. In safety language, that means that analyzing breaks down the safety threat to gain greater understanding of how it is occurring.

Assessing identifies safety threats; analyzing evaluates safety threats. Assessing tells you that threats to safety exist and require intervention. Analyzing tells you how safety threats are occurring, leading you to how you can control them.

When Is a Safety Analysis Completed?

You can't analyze a safety threat until its presence has been confirmed. Therefore, safety analysis follows safety assessment. Typically, a safety analysis can occur as an investigation winds down and a worker has completed the safety assessment. This is so because, in order to complete a safety analysis, you must possess sufficient information to understand the nature, proportion, function, and interrelationship of a safety threat. A safety analysis occurs before a safety plan is put in place. It is the understanding that you reach from the safety analysis that gives direction to what a safety plan has to be able to achieve. Safety plans control safety threats as they are uniquely displayed in a particular family. So, safety plans are dependent on a safety analysis that concludes how threats are uniquely displayed.

The following chart shows where safety analysis fits within the safety intervention process:



How Is a Safety Analysis Done?

A safety analysis is driven by the question: *How are safety threats occurring in the family?* The answer to the question can only be found within the information that has been gathered during the investigation/initial assessment. So, analysis of safety threats is totally dependent upon the quality and sufficiency

of information that you know about a family. A safety analysis occurs at the point that you have as full an understanding of the family as possible and have identified the presence of foreseeable danger in a safety assessment.

How safety threats are occurring within a family can be understood by 1) breaking the conditions associated with the threat or the threat itself into parts and 2) figuring out how the parts relate to each other and, then, how the parts reveal the way the threat is manifested. There are six analytical questions that help break the threat down with respect to how it is occurring within a family.

1. How long have conditions in the family posed a safety threat?
2. How frequent or often does the family condition pose a safety threat?
3. How predictable is the safety threat? Are there occasions when the safety factor is more likely to be an active influence?
4. Are there specific times during the day, evening, night, etc., that might require “special attention” due to the way in which the safety threat is manifested?
5. Do safety factors prevent a caregiver from adequately functioning in primary roles (i.e., individual life management and parenting)?
6. What is associated with, occurs at the same time, or influences the safety threat?

It must be clear how safety threats are manifested and operating in the family before a determination can be made regarding the type of safety plan that is required (i.e., in-home safety plan, out-of-home safety plan or a combination of both).

Understanding How Safety Threats Are Occurring

Identifying threats through safety assessment does not necessarily leave a person in a position to fully and accurately understand and explain how safety factors are manifested in the family. Understanding how safety threats are

occurring happens when a worker is conversant with information that explains the threat, related family conditions, and accompanying influences.

Competence in safety analysis can be demonstrated by a number of things. You will be able to detail how negative family and caregiver conditions are safety threats. You will be able to provide rationale and justification for your conclusions. It will be clear to you and others how long safety threats have existed. You will be able to explain how often or predictable safety threats are in terms of when they are active. Your documentation and conversations will describe and explain the pervasiveness of the safety factors' presence and effect in family life and functioning. You will be able to identify and explain what is associated with or influences a safety threat, such as substance use.

Final Comments

This brief look at safety analysis has been provided in order to emphasize the importance of the connection or bridge between identifying safety threats and doing something about them. Additionally, we wanted to emphasize the importance of critical thinking and due diligence concerning how seriously one should approach the business of understanding safety threats. Today it is common within safety intervention to move swiftly from identifying safety threats to installing a safety plan. The analysis of safety threats is not yet a routine practice in most places. Without the deeper understanding gained from a more rigorous examination of the nature and manifestation of a safety threat, we run the risk of relying on safety plans that do not take into account the fullness of how a safety threat may be occurring. An analysis of safety threats can fit smoothly between safety assessment and safety planning. Such an analysis can occur swiftly within the assessment to planning process. It may take a little time, depending on how conversant a person is with respect to his understanding of the family and its functioning. However, it should occur as a specific event in safety management, and it deserves focus and vigilance as a serious part of safety intervention.